

SARAH

The first typhoon of the 1977 season did not occur until mid-July. Meteorological satellite data on the morning of July 13th showed an area of convection some 225 nm (417 km) east of Koror (WMO 91408) in the Palau Islands. This tropical disturbance meandered on a 10 kt (19 km/hr), westward track and crossed Koror at 1200Z on the 14th. On the morning of the 15th, the system exhibited increased organization and a Tropical Cyclone Formation Alert was issued at 0000Z. Simultaneously, the disturbance took a more climatological, west-northwestward track and showed evidence of possessing multiple circulation centers.

During the 16th, satellite data hinted that the western-most circulation center was becoming the dominant one. Reconnaissance aircraft refuted this however, and fixed the primary center approximately 200 nm (370 km) east of the satellite positions. At 0943Z aircraft observed 38 kt (20 m/sec) winds at 700 mb and estimated surface winds at 25 kt (13 m/sec). Satellite data an hour later showed that convection in the area had, in fact, consolidated around the aircraft-fixed circulation center, and the first warning on Tropical Depression (TD) number 05 was issued at 1200Z.

By the evening of the 16th, TD 05 had accelerated to 17 kt (31 km/hr), and satellite data illustrated increased organization. At 1800Z the depression was upgraded to Tropical Storm Sarah, while located 30 nm (56 km) east of the Philippine island of Samar. During the subsequent 24 hours, Sarah, possessing 40 kt (21 m/sec) intensity, moved toward Manila at 13 kt (24 km/hr) on a west-northwest to northwest heading (Fig. 4-1). At 2355Z on the 17th, Clark AB observed a minimum sea level pressure of 997.3 mb; winds were from the northwest at 12 kt (6 m/sec). Within two hours winds at the Air Base had become southerly. Synoptic reports were of great value during this period. The mountainous terrain prevented aircraft reconnaissance of the low level circulation center, while frictional effects weakened and disorganized Sarah making satellite positioning very difficult.

From the evening of the 16th until the morning of the 20th upper level patterns in Sarah's environment were favorable for enhancement of her upper level outflow, which would normally result in intensification. The Tropical Upper Tropospheric Trough (TUTT) was oriented east-west, north of her and was enhancing outflow in the north semicircle; strongly divergent winds south of the tropical storm increased outflow to the south. While over land, however, Sarah could not intensify since the latent and sensible heat required to maintain sufficient thermal and related pressure gradients were not available. The tropical storm entered the South China Sea on the afternoon of the 18th and immediately began to intensify.

On the evening of the 19th, a mid-tropospheric low over south central China deepened and weakened the subtropical ridge north of Sarah; she responded and turned to the northwest; toward Hainan Island, still intensi-

fying. Sarah was upgraded to a typhoon at 1800Z and six hours later reached its maximum intensity of 75 kt (39 m/sec). At 2100Z Hsi-Sha-Tao (WMO 59981) reported sustained winds (10 minute average) of 60 kt (31 m/sec) from the west-southwest and a sea level pressure of 977.5 mb.

Sarah went ashore on Hainan Island on the evening of the 20th. At 1200Z Ch'iuung-Hai (19.3N-110.5E) reported 10 kt (5 m/sec) winds from the west and a sea level pressure of 978.5 mb. At this time Sarah's intensity was estimated to be 70 kt (36 m/sec). Meanwhile, the mid-level low over China had receded toward the north and the subtropical ridge began to build westward, north of Sarah. During the subsequent six hours, the typhoon slowed to 8 kt (15 km/hr) and took a westward course, passing north of the central mountain range of Hainan. At 1800Z Tan-Hsien (19.5N-109.6E) was near the center when it reported 15 kt (8 m/sec) winds from the east-northeast and a sea level pressure of 969.5 mb.

Typhoon Sarah entered the Gulf of Tonkin on the morning of the 21st with an estimated 65 kt (33 m/sec) intensity. The typhoon accelerated to 15 kt (28 km/hr) and went ashore near Haiphong. At 0600Z on the 21st, Kien-an Phulien (20.8N-106.6E), a Haiphong suburb, reported north-northwesterly winds of 30 kt (15 m/sec) and a sea level pressure of 986.9 mb. Six hours later these values had changed to 30 kt (15 m/sec) from the south and 988.5 mb with pressure rising rapidly.

The final warning on Sarah was issued at 1200Z on the 21st as she was dissipating over the Red River Valley, northwest of Hanoi. Very little damage occurred during Sarah's existence. Only Hanoi Radio reported cases of destruction with no casualties.

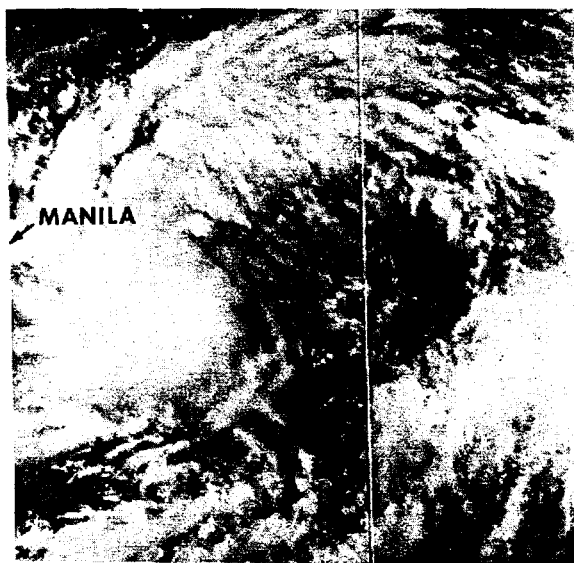


FIGURE 4-1. Sarah at 40 kt (21 m/sec) intensity crossing northeastern Samar, RP, 17 July 1977, 0057Z. (NOAA-5 imagery)